
LEVERAGING GIS DATA WITH WASHINGTON STATE FRAMEWORK

By Carrie Wolfe and George Spencer

Geographic Information Systems - a technology that promises to make it easier for us to make sense of the data we have to deal with - has always had the stigma of being expensive to get into. Ironically, the major expense has been that very data it promises to help with. Now, Washington State Framework partnership efforts are underway to share the work (and the cost) of the data we all need to do our jobs.

The power of GIS as a management, planning, and decision making tool has become increasingly prominent over the last several years. There are no signs of that trend slowing. Rather, GIS is becoming more mainstream in the information technology world as the issues we deal with become more complex.

Along with the expanded use of GIS, has come tremendous data collection and maintenance activities by all forms of government and private industry. Data collection and maintenance is the most significant cost associated to GIS. In looking for ways to reduce the effort and cost associated with GIS data we find that the current environment of individual GIS data development results in duplication of effort and redundant data. Oftentimes, the same GIS data are collected by many organizations. In other cases, an organization may lack the institutional capability to collect data that extends beyond their own jurisdictional boundary, even though it may be required for regional planning or analysis activities. The information may be available from another organization, but in many cases it is incompatible due to different standards and geographic bases.

National and state level framework efforts are beginning to address these issues and find ways of leveraging GIS data collection, maintenance, and use within the entire GIS community. The Framework is a partnership effort to create a widely available source of core GIS data and an environment that supports collaborative data collection, maintenance and use of these data. The Federal Geographic Data Committee (FGDC) initiated the concept of framework data. They identified seven themes of GIS framework data: geodetic control, orthoimagery, elevation, transportation, hydrography, governmental units, and cadastral information. FGDC data standards have been developed for some of these themes. The FGDC has also produced some framework development guidance materials.

In Washington state, the Framework concept has been endorsed by the Washington Geographic Information Council (WAGIC). Last year the WAGIC sponsored the development of a strategic plan for GIS in the state. A priority objective that surfaced in the plan was to complete the framework data layers for our state. The Framework Management Group (FMG), a subcommittee of the WAGIC, has been working on this objective. The FMG consists of multiple federal, state, local, tribal, and private organizations that have come together to advance framework development in Washington. Current development efforts are focused on cadastral, hydrography, and transportation data themes.

So what does this have to do with you? For starters, the Framework will save time, money and effort to acquire and use GIS data. With the Framework in place, you will only have to develop and maintain your own data - something you likely already are doing in one form or another. With the Framework, when you need to look across your boundary for a more regional view, you will be able to grab data from the Framework provided by your neighbors. As long as you follow the standards and practices set up for framework, your data will "fit" with the framework data just like pieces in a puzzle. For example, the road, the bridge, and the stream will come together at the right place even though the data may come from three different places. When this happens, better decisions and better cooperation will result because we will all be using the same data, the best data that is available.

Of course, this is going to take a lot of cooperation and sharing to make it happen - data isn't going to magically appear. There is no pot of gold to draw from to build the Framework. Rather, for the Framework to happen resources need to be pooled - each of us contributing our piece to the data puzzle. As more organizations become contributing partners, the data gaps will be filled and the overall quality of the data will be improved. Just as important, the cost of the data will be less for each organization because we will only have to maintain

the data we are responsible for. One thing is certain, we are only going to get to a framework through broad participation.

For more information about Washington state framework efforts or to become a partner organization, contact Carrie Wolfe or George Spencer. Carrie can be reached at phone: (360) 902-1639 or email: carrie.wolfe@wadnr.gov. George can be reached at phone: (360) 709-5515 or email: spenceg@wsdot.wa.gov. On the web, see Framework at <http://framework.dnr.state.wa.us/> and WAGIC at <http://www.wa.gov/gic/>.

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This page was revised on: 8/6/01